

DON'T YOU BELIEVE IT

(I Cor. 15:12,32)

Parts of the fifteenth chapter of St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians sound like a radio program I hear sometimes. One voice will come on making very reasonable, common-sense statements like, "Sinbad was a sailor who told tall tales in Arabia", or "The Pilgrims were Puritans who ~~told tall tales in Arabia~~ didn't let people have much fun." And just as you find yourself automatically nodding your head in agreement, a deep voice booms out, "Don't you believe it!", and you suddenly find out how wrong you've been all these years. For when you look more deeply at some of the things we you've always taken for granted, they turn out to be not true at all. Sinbad wasn't a sailor. He was a merchant. [And not all the Pilgrims were Puritans, and besides, Puritans had a lot more fun than most people realize.] So don't you believe it!

Writing to the Corinthians Paul does something of the same thing. ^{Some say} "There is no resurrection of the dead, ~~some say~~," he writes. So "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." (vs. 12, 32) It was a common expression. But don't you believe it, says Paul quickly. "Do not be deceived". [And he proceeds to zero in on some common misconceptions about Christian belief and practice.]

We, too, need an occasional "Don't you believe it" booming in our ears. We probably need it more than the Corinthians. Your generation, for example, has lived its whole conscious life in a state of continuous psychological bombardment. You are never out of range of some form of mass communication--radio, television, loudspeakers, advertisements, newspapers, signboards, phonographs. There's no end to it. ^{an unrelenting assault on the senses} ~~(Even the comic strips are)~~ in on it. ~~Twenty out of the sixty new comic strips that have appeared in the last ten years don't pretend to be funny, they have a definite political or social line,~~ and the fall-out from this unremitting assault on the senses can be as dangerous as any atomic fall-out. Nuclear radiation affects only the body. But the mass-media radiation you've grown up under affects the mind. And frankly speaking, we still don't know just how it is going to affect the human race. Psychologists are only now beginning to notice the difference between the one-dimensional effect of reading, or listening to the radio, and the total, saturating impact of television, ~~particularly on the young.~~ We soak in so much, before we even realize it, ~~and~~ it takes a loud "Don't you believe it" to shake us into thinking for ourselves again.

So let me take Paul's words and rework them to fit your own particular situation. He might put it this way to you, since you are not Corinthians listening to Greek philosophers, but ^{the 20th century} ~~seniors~~ ^{coming home from} graduating from High School. He might write, "Some people say 'you can't be a Christian in college.' Don't you believe it". ^{the 20th century} ~~It is not too far from what he said to the Corinthians, because behind the sneering remark, 'You can't be a Christian in college'~~ ^{he Paul} ~~lie the same two attacks on the Christian faith from which he~~ was defending the church in Corinth. The Greeks were saying

when you leave church, "You can't be a Christian in college" or "You can't be a Christian and a mature, thinking adult." Don't you believe it!

or scientists in a medical institution, or Christians in an increasingly non-Christian world.

about Christians that, in the first place, they were intellectually too credulous--a man rising from the dead?-- and secondly, that they were morally over-restrictive--as for us, let's eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

Isn't that what they mean today when they say, "You can't be a Christian in college." They mean, first, that Christianity is for the intellectually immature; ^{when that the human race has} when you grow up and start thinking in college, you learn better. Or they mean, second, that Christianity is for the morally immature; all those rules are for kids; when you grow up and start living in college, you learn better. ^{Don't you believe it.}

[You won't be out of High School long before you'll hear talk like that.] It will come in different ways; ^{these attitudes on the Christian faith} not often, I hope, in the brutal way it hit one girl recently. In her very first college class the professor started off on myths and superstitions, and suddenly asked, "How many of you, for example, still believe the Bible? Raise your hands." And because it was obvious he was going to make fun of anyone who said "Yes", only two in that class had the courage to raise their hands.

It won't come at you quite that way. But you'll get the message: Jesus is for Sunday School; you're ^{grown up} ~~in college~~ now. You can't be a Christian in college. ^{Don't you believe it!}

Now I am not going to tell you that it is easy to be a Christian in college. I'm not sure that it is easy to be a Christian anywhere. ^{many times} I've found it rather difficult at times even in church. But don't let anyone tell you you can't be a Christian ^{today's world} in college. ^(on a scientific basis, or not.)

Take another look at these smooth-sounding statements. First, they tell you, "Christianity is for the intellectually immature. When you grow up and start thinking, you'll learn better." Don't you believe it.

^{For one thing,} ~~In the first place, [don't let that kind of a cynical, condescending attitude put you on the defensive.]~~ Any time you find a man laughing or sneering away the Christian faith, you can mark him down without a shadow of a doubt as a mediocre mind. He's only posing as an intellectual. A truly great mind may reject Christianity--it's happened before and it will happen again--but he will never laugh at it.

I think of Einstein in this connection. He was not a Christian, as you know. But I can still remember him wandering through the Princeton campus, sometimes with an ice cream cone, sometimes without socks, his white hair waving in the wind. Occasionally he came to prayermeetings at the seminary. Why? He wasn't a Christian. He came because though he was not a Christian he had found something in the Christian faith which he respected even when he could not understand it. He put it this way:

~~"Being a lover of freedom,~~ When the (Hitler) revolution came in Germany I looked to the universities to defend ^(freedom) it...but no, the universities..were silenced. Then I looked to the great editors..but they were silenced in a few short weeks.. Only the church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing truth.. The church alone had the courage and persistence

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to stand for intellectual truth and moral freedom. I am forced to confess that what I once despised I now praise unreservedly.

Note particularly that what Einstein praises in the Christian church--intellectual truth and moral freedom--are precisely the two things which little minds say that Christians do not have.

^{It has been said} They say that Einstein's was the greatest human mind ^{the world has known} since Sir Isaac Newton. Einstein and Newton: - ~~It is~~ a good combination to remember when people sneer at the faith for intellectual immaturity. Einstein at the end of his life was still willing to learn from Christians, not laugh at them. And Newton was so devout a Christian that he thought his greatest work was not the discovery of the law of gravity, ^{which made him famous} but ^{which was denied by astronomers - "Why deny it?" Newton} a Commentary he wrote on the Book of Daniel. [It was Newton who first separated white light into the colors of which it is made up. It was Newton who gave the world the first reflecting telescope. But he was more than a mathematician and astronomer; he was a student of the Bible and a humble believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. After his experiments with light and optics, he exclaimed, "Did blind chance know that there was light, and what was its refraction, and fit the eyes of all creatures, after the most curious manner, to make use of it?" No. "...There is a Being who made all things, and has all things in his power..." (Eggleston, in S.S. Times)] In that age it was Voltaire who sneered, and Newton who believed; and it was Newton who had the better mind.

I am quite aware that Newton died more than two hundred years ago. First-rate minds, however, never really go out of fashion. But lest you think that Christians are limited to dead scientists, let me share with you some remarks by a physicist with the NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). (HIS Mar. '57)

Like St Paul, he writes that some people have difficulty with the resurrection, particularly those who are trying to be scientific and who think they can't believe anything they don't understand. But he goes on to distinguish between normal scientific practice and what we might call hyper-science, that is, using the scientific method where it doesn't belong. Hyper-science is the old-fashioned science of a hundred years ago when scientists still hoped to discover ultimate truths in the material universe. But not now. Now they have learned to live with the limitations of the scientific method, and have found they are forced to believe, sometimes, even when they cannot prove. New, basic principles discovered in the 20th century, like the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, he says, make ultimate answers from science impossible, whether in physical matters or spiritual matters. So today it is atheism, not Christianity, which modern science has made intellectually immature.

^{So when I} ^{Today} If you believe in God [in college] don't let anyone tell you you've left your mind behind in Sunday School. Just reply, like one modern philosopher (Gollwitzer), that "while it cannot be scientifically proved that God is, what can be proved is that the statement God is not, is the statement of a fool." ~~So let this be a challenge to you.~~ ^{So let this be} Keep thinking, you Christians, Part of the victory of the early church was that it out-thought even the philosophers of Athens, and the victory we must win in our day must still be, part of it, in the realm of the intellect.

But what about the other popular argument against Christianity - that it's for moral paddy-daddies -

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Now what about the other point in the argument against Christianity -
[So much for the assertion that you cannot be a Christian in college intellectually.] What about the other statement, that you cannot be a Christian morally ~~in college~~, that the old rules are dead, that college is for living, and a little swinging?

Well, I will go along with that part way; I'll go along with it just as far as the Bible does, and it goes farther than you might think. After all, it was the Bible, not the 20th century, that first said, "Now we are free from the law.. We serve not under the old written code, but in the new life of the Spirit." (Rom. 7:6) Christianity, too, is for living, not for old musty laws.

But first, be sure that you know what real living is. If you make a mistake there, at that crucial point, you can spend the rest of your life painfully living down what you once thought was living it up. Let's take an extreme example. People are doing a lot of talking these days about LSD. ^{drugs} You hear wonderful stories about the drug-dreams of the trippers, the ecstatic music, the three-dimensional color fantasies, the shimmering clarity with which for once they see life and see it whole. This is real living, you think, so why not try it? Well, why not? How do you answer that?

Do you say, "Because there is a rule against it?" That's one answer, but not the best. A more Christian answer is that in our way of looking at things, people are for life, and LSD is ^{for an unstable life, which is} ~~more~~ ^{sometimes} for death. Not necessarily death like an LSD tripper thinking he can fly and jumping off a 15-story building. That gets in the papers, and it's true, but it's an exception. No, it is a slower death than that. A scientist who tried LSD recently as an experiment wrote that it began with the wonderful fantasies, all right, and a liberating exhilaration, but when the drug wore off there followed four weeks of living hell, and six terrible months on the teetering edge of insanity. In his case, he said, there was only one way out. He went to a Christian pastor and found that only faith in a steadfast, loving God was able to pull him back to stability and life. (His, March '67, pp. 5-7)

Christianity is not a set of rules. You are right about that. Christianity is life, real life. But life itself has rules, and moral maturity does not mean escape from law and doing at last only what you want to do.

In his helpful book, The Restless Quest of Modern Man, William Cole tells the story of a man killed in an automobile accident who wakes up in the Great Beyond. "At his elbow stands a liveried butler whose task it is to satisfy (his) slightest whim. The most trivial ^{wish} ~~wish~~ is at once realized. (But) the first flush of gratification produced by this wonderful translation into the land of dreams fulfilled is followed by the pallor of boredom. Finally (he) tells the butler that (he is tired of it all) and for variety's sake he wants to visit Hell." And the butler says, "Just where do you think you are?" *undisciplined self gratification is hell.*

Life without rules is hell, not heaven. ^{True with drugs} It ~~doesn't take~~ ^{drug} an LSD trip to prove it. It is true in sex; it is true even in eating and drinking. Taking away the rules does not make life

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happier, however much you'd like to think so sometimes, any more than taking away the traffic lights would speed up traffic, although you'd like to think that too, sometimes. It only ties it up in tighter knots.

So Moral maturity is not getting away from rules, but finding ^{and making them} making the real rules of life, God's rules, your own, and accepting his world for what it really is, instead of trying to escape into a ^{make-believe} fantasy world of your own. ^{that it will take you out of the living world, back to the Dark Ages} Don't be too afraid that this will make you unpopular.

^{a few years ago on} We lived ~~last~~ furlough next to the Princeton University campus, and the whole country was talking about a Princeton senior. Why? Well, partly because he was one of the athletic greats of the century. To watch Bill Bradley on the basketball court in the Princeton gym people came from as far away as California and Hawaii. And partly because he was an unusually gifted scholar. He ~~is~~ ^{is} went on to a finishing-up his Rhodes scholarship at Oxford. ~~right now~~. But what riveted attention on that young man, perhaps, more than anything else, was his clear Christian life and testimony. He did not feel he had to follow the crowd to be popular. He didn't hesitate to teach a Sunday School class, even, though that isn't considered the swaggiest thing to do in a college crowd. But he was the most popular and respected man on campus. Who says you can't be a Christian in college? ^{the 20th c.}

When they tell you "there is no resurrection of the dead." ^{when they say,} "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." When they say you can't be a Christian in college, remember Bill Bradley. No, that is not ^{the 20th c.} enough. Remember the Apostle Paul, ^{and he} He says, "Don't you believe it.. [Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.]" And above all, remember Jesus Christ who rose again from the dead that you might know the truth, that the truth might make you free; ^{and that you might have life, and have it more abundantly]}